

• 501



A small diving boat.

Photo : Sir Charles Belgrave.

228



A fully equipped diver. On the ground are the ropes and the weight, on his fingers are leather guards, a bag is round his neck and a clip on his nose.

Photo : Sir Charles Belgrave.



A diver's bag and the hauler.

Photo :
Sir Charles Belgrave.

228 story that Bahrain pearls are superior in colour to all others because of the presence in the seas around Bahrain of numerous fresh-water springs. In fact the real origin of the pearl inspires no romance, it is the process by which the pearl shell rids itself of an unwelcome intruder. The oyster, when opening to obtain food, often admits small particles of sand or some other substance which irritate its soft flesh, the shell therefore covers the intruder with a secretion that forms a smooth coat of nacre. Once this process has started it continues, more and more layers are built up until the process is stopped by the pearl being removed from its shell or when some accident happens to it. If a pearl is cut in half and examined under the microscope the layers of the nacre can clearly be seen.

221 The "Gaus al-Kabir" or main diving season takes place from June
228 to early in October, but before and after the season there is the "Gaus al-Bard" or cold diving season, the duration of which is determined by weather conditions, but which is not recognised as the diving season *par excellence*. In former days the departure of the Bahrain fleet for the pearl banks was the occasion of great excitement, and with drums playing and small boys cheering the boats would sail away from Muharraq. After being joined by boats from other coastal towns and villages the fleet would proceed to the pearl banks, where each boat would choose its own anchorage and prepare for diving.

501 Formerly the boat built especially for pearl diving was the samboq
228 (see Chapter VII), but today the most usual boat is the jalibut, while many very small boats with crews of a dozen men go out to the banks. All pearlers are equipped with special oars with square blades, and on arriving at the banks these are tied so that they project over the water. 228 At each oar two ropes are thrown overboard, one attached to a stone or metal weight and the other to a net bag, although the bag is sometimes hung round the diver's neck. The divers then strip to the buff, or content themselves with a narrow loin cloth, they put on nose clips of bone or tortoise-shell and protect their fingers with leather guards. Putting their feet in a loop in the weighted rope, the divers are swiftly let down, each by his Saib or puller, who remains on deck holding the ropes with the careful hand of a fisherman, but more is at stake than a trout or a salmon, for if the Saib fails to hoist the diver to the surface directly he feels his pull on the rope, the diver's life is in danger. When the diver reaches the sea-bed the weighted rope is pulled up while the diver keeps hold on the second rope. While on the sea-bed the diver hacks off with a small knife as many pearl shells as he can, usually collecting about ten shells in the minute and a half he spends below the surface. When exhausted he tugs sharply at the rope and is hauled to the surface. Twelve fathoms is about the maximum depth to which he dives, and it is easy to picture the frantic rush at this depth to collect the necessary shells. On coming to the surface the diver hangs, resting on the weighted rope, while the Saib tips the bag of shells on to the deck. The rest periods vary with the weather. When it is cold the divers spend two thirds of the time resting on the deck of the

The products of Aali are simple in the extreme, pots, bowls, water jars and dishes, utensils which have always been used by the people of Bahrain and which still find a ready market though the increased prosperity of the people enables them to buy cheap imported goods. It is not necessary to go to Aali itself to see the products of the potteries for at the Suq al-Araba in Manama on Wednesday mornings and at the Suq al-Khamis market on Thursday mornings the people of Aali bring their goods for sale.

323

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At Aali the photographer will find many subjects for his camera. The potters in their workshops with the sun shining on the damp yellow clay, the symmetrical stacks of jars drying in the sun, the small boys in bright clothes running up and down the steep sides of the tumuli with objects to be baked and finally the removal of the finished articles, all these scenes provide fascinating pictures.

NURA (LIME)

Aali, as well as being the centre of the Bahrain pottery industry, is the principal place where lime is produced. Stone for the purpose is hewn from the ground in many parts of Bahrain, especially near Rifaa, and is taken in lorries or in donkey carts to Aali. Here the blocks of limestone are arranged on layers of wood, usually date palm trunks, and the wood is then fired. Men with large wooden flails stand round the piles of lime-stone and beat it into powder, chanting as they work and timing the singing to the down strokes of the threshers. When the lime becomes fine powder it is sieved and then placed in sacks. The produce of Aali commands a ready sale, for all the white-wash used in Bahrain is made there or in the neighbourhood and with the present building activities the people of the country have their work cut out to supply the local demand.

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[339]

There is also in Bahrain a lime factory, owned by a member of the Ruling Family, where lime is produced by modern methods.

FISHING

Fish and fish oil are used for many purposes in Bahrain. The former is one of the staple items of food among the poorer classes, it is used for manure in gardens and for feeding cows and donkeys. Fish oil is used for oiling wooden boats to make them seaworthy. The fact that Bahrain cows are fed on fish, together with dates, date stones, lucerne and bran, leads people to expect that the local milk will taste unusual. This is not true despite the reports of journalists, who hear about the fishy diet without tasting the milk and describe its flavour as unpleasant. Milk from Bahrain cows, if they receive a balanced diet, is unusually good and has a higher average fat content than the milk of ordinary English cows. The use of fish oil on the boats along the shore has little to commend itself to visitors, the smell is extremely disagreeable and drives the people who live in houses near the sea to shut all their windows when the boats are being treated.

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Almost all the cultivators are Baharna or Hassawis, who are of the Shiite sect, descendants of Baharna who emigrated to Arabia. The Sunni Arabs do not work in the gardens. The people living in the villages which are scattered among the date gardens originally earned their livelihood entirely by working in the gardens; now many of them are employed by the oil company or in Manama. During the date picking season, which in many ways resembles the hop picking season in England, temporary villages of palm branch huts spring up among the date gardens when people from other parts of Bahrain come to pick the crop.

The village people are the aboriginal inhabitants of the country and in the past they suffered much during the many invasions of Bahrain when their homes, gardens and water channels were destroyed and even in times of peace they were regarded as milch cows, whose wealth was extracted by their rulers. But in recent times their position has changed, they are more prosperous than they used to be and are on terms of equality with their neighbours.

BOAT BUILDING

174
It is claimed by some authorities on Middle Eastern history that the Phoenicians originated in Bahrain and sailed their craft up the Gulf, which then extended much farther northwards than it does today, and following the Euphrates to the point where the river is nearest to the Syrian coast, they landed and settled there. This may or may not be true but there is no doubt that the people of Bahrain have been sailors for at least as many centuries as the pearl industry has been in existence and their stitched boats not only sailed the Persian Gulf but entered the Indian Ocean.

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Most of Bahrain's boats were in former days employed as pearlers, and although the Kuwait shipyards built the largest craft it was natural that Bahrain, nearer the Indian source of timber and itself the centre of the pearling industry, should have its own yards. It should also be remembered that Kuwait is a comparatively modern town, having been founded early in the 18th century, before which date it did not attain importance as a harbour for north-east Arabia.

Today most of the boat building is carried on in Muharraaq, although there are some yards at the western end of Manama. In former days, before iron nails were obtainable, Arab boats were not nailed but stitched together, with a giant needle and cord as thread, yet these boats of such fragile construction were able to weather the heaviest gales that swept the Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

In recent years launches have been made in greater numbers than sailing boats, so builders have inclined to specialise in the construction of those boats to which engines can best be fitted. For this reason many "jalibuts" have been built, they can be identified by their vertical bow and the straightness of the keel. The origin of this name is doubtful and many suggestions have been made to explain it. Possibly

the most logical is that of H. R. P. Dickson, who says in his *The Arab of the Desert* that the name is derived from the Indian boat called "Gallevat" which is in turn derived from the Portuguese "Galeote" or Galley. 501 ● 396

The type of craft most used for pearling in Bahrain is the Sambuq, which has a long finely curved bow and a square stern. It has two masts and is usually fully decked. Another boat of the same type is the Shu'ai, which only differs from the Sambuq in the shape of the stern piece. A second boat with Portuguese connections is the Baghala, a large craft with a comparatively short curved stern-piece. The Baghala has a distinctive square stern set with windows, which, although often false, give the stern the appearance of an old fashioned European man-of-war. The largest boat now being built is the Boom, which can be identified by its long straight stern-piece and its stern, set about 10° from the vertical.

Boats are not built on the scale of former days, for the decline of the pearling industry and the development of the fast launch have reduced the demand for the large old-fashioned sailing boats. Launches need a smaller crew, they are more useful for work between steamers and the shore and over short distances, and are now in many other ways a more satisfactory investment than sailing boats.

Many small types of boats are used around the shores of Bahrain for fishing and for carrying passengers between the islands. Some of these are built like miniature sambuq, while others have the vertical bow of the jalibut. There is also the huri, a primitive canoe hollowed out of the trunk of a tree and imported from Africa for use as a ship's dinghy. An entirely local product is the huwainyah, a craft built of date stems tightly tied together with date fibre and soaked in fish oil. These little boats, which if well made are entirely water-proof, can carry a man or two boys and are used for fishing and ferrying.

A question that always confuses visitors to Bahrain is the word "dhow"; this name, originally unknown to the Arabs, is used by Europeans to include all Persian Gulf sailing boats, and has become so general that Arabs, finding the word useful, are now beginning to use it themselves.

The craftsmen who make the boats of Bahrain have an interesting sideline, they make perfect miniature models of the large sailing boats, not only of the ones at present in use but also of the obsolete types, and these can be purchased from them and make interesting ornaments in the house or souvenirs of Bahrain. [523]

JUS

"Jus," the Arabic for gypsum, has always been used for building purposes in Bahrain; the pre-historic tombs are lined with it and it was used for the construction of the 10th century mosque at the Suq al-Khamis. It is found in slabs below the ground and is collected in many places in Bahrain, in Lozi, from the desert north of Awali and from the Howar Islands. The gypsum is often prepared on the spot where it 316 339

THE PERSIAN GULF SHAIKHDOMS

129

adequate motor-bus communications with most of the villages.

Manama is the shipping centre of the Gulf pearl industry,¹ and steamers connect regularly with India, Persia, and Iraq. Bahrain harbour is also the centre of a considerable coastal and pearling trade by dhows, as well as the local headquarters of its fishing industry. Other local industries are dhow-building and the manufacture of sailcloth and reed matting. Much of the import and export trade from al-Hasa and its hinterland passes through Bahrain, and this created an important source of revenue during the years in which Aramco was developing its oilfields on the Saudi coast. Lately, however, the Saudis have perceived the advantage of conducting this trade for themselves. By establishing a high-cost re-entry permit, they have discouraged the foreign staff of the oil company from doing its week-end shopping in Bahrain, and their policy is to increase the port and market facilities of the two Saudi coastal towns opposite the island—Dammam and Al Khobar. In Bahrain there is a duty of 5 per cent ad valorem on essential imports such as food and clothing; non-essential imports are subject to higher duties, ranging between 15 per cent on tobacco and liquor, and 10 per cent on luxuries.

History and Foreign Relations

The presence in the northern part of Bahrain Island of numerous burial tumuli indicates very early human inhabitants, but their identity, which was at one time thought to be Phoenician, remains unknown. Bahrain's situation and natural harbour facilities suggest that from the earliest days of sea navigation in the Gulf the port was important. Its recorded history, however, dates only from 1507, when the Portuguese occupied the island. They built a fort of which the ruins survive, but were driven out in 1602 by an Arab invasion from Persia. Bahrain was held by Persia intermittently until 1783, when it was conquered by Arabs from the mainland. Since 1816 it has been ruled by the Khalifa family of the Utubi tribe, which in 1820 first entered into treaty relations with the East India Company. But the Persian Government has never ceased to claim sovereignty over the island and at intervals has protested against British treaties with the Shaikh. The Persian claim is based on a British Note of 27 April 1869 in which (the Persians allege)² Lord Clarendon recognized their title to sovereignty over the

¹ This has long been important, and in the 1830's the fisheries were estimated to bring in some £300,000 to £400,000 a year.

² The Persian claim was disposed of by Sir Austen Chamberlain in a Note of 18 January 1928. See League of Nations, *Official Journal*, May 1928, pp. 606-7.